

# CRS Report for Congress

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## TRIO and GEAR UP Programs: Provisions and Status

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### Summary

The Higher Education Act supports several programs providing services and incentives to increase students' secondary and postsecondary educational attainment. Foremost among these programs are the Federal TRIO programs and the newly enacted GEAR UP program. The TRIO programs provide a wide range of support services primarily to low-income students and first generation college students. The FY1999 appropriation for these programs is \$600 million. The newly authorized GEAR UP program will provide intervention services and incentives to encourage primarily low-income students to complete high school and enroll in postsecondary education. The FY1999 appropriation for GEAR UP is \$120 million. This background report describes the TRIO and GEAR UP programs and identifies several implementation issues. It will be updated as new program data become available.

### Introduction

The Higher Education Act (HEA) is the source in 1997-1998 of nearly \$42 billion in federally supported grant, loan, and work-study assistance to help meet the costs of postsecondary education. The HEA also supports several programs that complement this student aid by providing services and incentives to students to help increase their secondary or postsecondary educational attainment. These programs are premised on the belief that, although addressing financial barriers to postsecondary enrollment is necessary, it is not sufficient for many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Foremost among these programs are the Federal TRIO programs — Talent Search (TS), Upward Bound (UB), Student Support Services (SSS), Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement (MPA), Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC), and Staff Development (SD) programs — and the newly enacted Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP). TRIO and GEAR UP, both administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), have many objectives in common and will support several similar activities. They were recently amended or enacted by the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (P.L. 105-244).



This report describes the TRIO and GEAR UP programs and identifies selected implementation issues. It will be updated as new program data become available.

## TRIO Programs

The TRIO programs, so-called because at one juncture there were only three, trace their roots to the Johnson Administration's Great Society. They are currently authorized by HEA Title IV, Part A, Subpart 2, Chapter 1. They are primarily intended to provide support services to low-income students, individuals who would be first generation college students (neither parent has completed a baccalaureate degree), or disabled students. The precise target population differs among the various TRIO programs. The Higher Education Amendments of 1998 made relatively minor changes to these programs.

**General Provisions.** In general, TRIO grants are competitively awarded for a period of 4 years, with applicants ranked in the top 10% of funded applicants receiving 5-year awards. SD grants are awarded for 2-year periods. In selecting grantees, the Secretary of Education considers an applicant's prior experience in delivering services under the TRIO programs. Except as noted below, eligible grantees include postsecondary education institutions (i.e., public and private nonprofit 2-year and 4-year higher education institutions, and proprietary institutions), public and private agencies, combinations of such entities, and in exceptional circumstances, secondary schools.

The Secretary is to encourage coordination of each TRIO project with any programs for disadvantaged students operated by a grantee. A TRIO project director is permitted to administer other programs for disadvantaged students operated by the grantee.

The Secretary is authorized to support evaluations of the effectiveness of these programs. Grants may be awarded to entities that were carrying out TRIO projects prior to enactment of the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 (October 7, 1998) to support their efforts to expand the success of TRIO activities by working with other entities not presently participating in these programs.

**Talent Search.** This program is intended to encourage youth with potential for postsecondary education to complete high school and enter postsecondary education; to encourage dropouts to reenter education; and to disseminate information about available postsecondary student assistance. At least two-thirds of each project's participants must be low-income individuals who would be first generation college students. Participants must have completed a minimum of 5 years of elementary education, or be 11 to 27 years of age. (Age limits in any TRIO program can be waived if they would prevent a project from achieving program purposes.)

Among services provided by TS projects are: assistance in completing college admissions and financial aid applications, and preparing for college entrance exams; guidance and assistance to individuals for reentering secondary school or entering general educational development (GED) programs; personal and career counseling; tutoring; exposure to college campuses, cultural events and academic programs; assistance in secondary school and college course selection; workshops and counseling for participants' families; and mentoring programs.

**Upward Bound.** UB projects are intended to provide precollege students with the skills and motivation needed to succeed in postsecondary education. At least two-thirds of project participants must be low-income students who would be first generation college goers; the remainder must be either low-income or prospective first generation college goers. Participants must have completed at least 8 years of elementary education, and be 13 to 19 years of age.

Among allowable UB services are the following: instruction in math, lab science, foreign language, composition, and literature (required of projects that have received 2 or more years of assistance); counseling and workshops; tutoring; mentoring; exposure to cultural events; activities acquainting participants with career options; work-study positions exposing participants to careers requiring postsecondary education; and residential programs on college campuses. Most UB projects provide 6-week summer programs on college campuses. Participants may receive monthly stipends of up to \$60 during the summer (work-study students may receive monthly stipends of \$300 in the summer) and \$40 during the rest of the year. ED also funds Upward Bound Math and Science Centers providing intensive instruction in math and science, and Veterans Upward Bound projects offering veterans such services as basic skills development.

**Student Support Services.** SSS projects are intended to improve college students' retention and graduation rates, and improve the transfer rates of students from 2-year to 4-year colleges. Program regulations limit eligible grantees to postsecondary education institutions. At least two-thirds of SSS participants in any project must be either disabled individuals or low-income, first generation college goers. The remaining participants must be low-income, or first generation college goers, or disabled. Not less than one-third of the disabled participants must be low-income as well.

SSS projects may provide such services as: instruction in reading, writing, study skills, math, and other subjects; academic counseling; exposure to cultural events, academic programs, and career options; assistance in the graduate admission and financial aid processes; assistance in transferring from 2-year to 4-year colleges; and mentoring. In selecting grantees, the Secretary must consider an institution's efforts to provide participants with aid sufficient to meet full financial need and to constrain student debt.

**McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement.** MPA projects seek to prepare disadvantaged students for doctoral study. Program regulations limit eligible grantees to postsecondary education institutions. At least two-thirds of participants must be low-income, first generation college goers; the remainder must be from groups underrepresented in graduate education.

Among the services that may be provided are: research opportunities, seminars, and other activities preparing students for doctoral study; summer internships; tutoring; academic counseling; assistance in securing graduate admission and financial aid; mentoring; and exposure to cultural events and academic programs. Research participants may receive an annual award providing a stipend of up to \$2,800; the award may cover the costs of summer tuition, room and board, and transportation as well.

**Educational Opportunity Centers.** This program is intended to provide information to prospective postsecondary students regarding available financial aid and academic assistance, and help them apply for admission and financial aid. At least two-

thirds of participants in any project must be low-income students who would be first generation college goers. They must also be at least 19 years old.

EOCs may provide: information to communities about postsecondary education and training opportunities; assistance for completing admission and financial aid applications; assistance preparing for college entrance exams; guidance on reentering secondary school, or entering a GED program or other program for high school dropouts; personal counseling; tutoring; career workshops; and mentoring.

**Staff Development.** This program supports training of current and prospective TRIO staff. Grants can be made to postsecondary education institutions, and public and private nonprofit entities. Among authorized SD activities are conferences, internships, seminars, workshops, and publication of training manuals. Annually, one or more of the projects must train new TRIO project directors, and must address the following: legislative and regulatory requirements for operating TRIO projects, guidance on assisting students in receiving adequate amounts of student aid, the design and operation of model TRIO projects, and the use of educational technology in operating TRIO projects.

**Funding.** The FY1999 authorization level for the TRIO programs is \$700 million; such sums as necessary are authorized for the 4 succeeding fiscal years. Over the past 5 years, the annual appropriation for the TRIO programs has risen 30%, from \$463 million in FY1995 to \$600 million in FY1999. The FY1999 appropriation has not yet been allocated among the various TRIO programs. For FY1998, the estimated division of the appropriation of \$529.7 million was as follows: TS — \$97.6 million; UB — \$202.5 million; SSS — \$171.8 million; MPA — \$20.8 million; EOC — \$29.7 million; SD — \$3.6 million; administration, evaluation, and peer review — \$3.7 million. ED estimates that more than 735,000 students and TRIO staff were served by the FY1998 funding.

## GEAR UP

The GEAR UP program, partly a successor to the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership (NEISP) program, was added to HEA Title IV by the Higher Education Amendments of 1998. State-level components of GEAR UP reflect the prior NEISP program (established by the Higher Education Amendments of 1992 — P.L. 102-325 — and first funded in FY1994). GEAR UP seeks to increase disadvantaged students' secondary school completion and postsecondary enrollment by providing support services and by assuring students of the availability of financial aid to meet college costs.

**Eligible Entities.** States or partnerships are eligible for funding. A partnership must consist of (1) one or more school districts acting on behalf of one or more elementary or secondary schools; (2) one or more postsecondary education institutions; and (3) at least two other entities, such as community organizations, state agencies, or other public or private agencies. In making awards, ED is to give priority to states that carried out successful programs under NEISP. Further, ED is to award continuation grants to prior NEISP states under the terms and conditions applicable under prior law. Of the amount remaining after funding continuation awards, at least 33% is for states, at least 33% is for partnerships, and the remainder is awarded to either states or partnerships. The allocation of the remainder between states and partnerships is to be reevaluated annually. Participating entities must provide from non-federal funds at least 50% of the cost of the program. Partnerships' matching level can be modified through regulation.

**Early Intervention Activities.** Any funded state or partnership must provide comprehensive mentoring, counseling, outreach, and support services to participating students. This counseling must address financial aid, college applications and admissions, and foster parental involvement in the college preparation process. Projects may: provide a system of mentoring and advising; require students to enter into agreements to achieve specific academic milestones in exchange for tuition assistance; provide services to ensure high school completion and college enrollment of at-risk individuals; provide summer programs for high school sophomores or juniors or students planning on going to college in the coming academic year; and require students to meet other standards.

Participating states are required to make low-income students a priority for services. Partnerships are required to provide services to at least one grade level of students (beginning by the 7<sup>th</sup> grade) in a school with a 7<sup>th</sup> grade and with an enrollment at least half of which is eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (the Higher Education Amendments of 1998 conference report, H.Rept. 105-750, suggests that the enrollment in the selected **grade** must meet the school lunch requirement). Alternatively, services can be provided to students in a particular grade (beginning by the 7<sup>th</sup> grade) who reside in public housing, presumably regardless of the schools they attend. Partnerships must ensure that services are provided to each such cohort of students through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. They must coordinate services with existing early intervention programs, and not duplicate available services.

**Scholarships.** Participating states are **required** to establish or maintain a postsecondary scholarship program for participants; partnerships are **permitted** to include a scholarship component. The minimum amount of these scholarships is the lesser of 75% of the annual average cost of attendance for an in-state student in a 4-year program at public higher education institutions in the state, or the maximum Pell Grant for that fiscal year (the program statute provides that the total amount of Title IV aid cannot exceed a student's cost of attendance). To be eligible to receive the initial scholarship, a student must be less than 22 years old; have received a high school diploma or equivalent on or after January 1, 1993; be enrolled or accepted for enrollment in an undergraduate program at an institution located in the state (at a state's option, the GEAR UP scholarship can be made portable); and have participated in the GEAR UP early intervention component (at the participating entity's option, TRIO participation can qualify a student). Current Pell Grant recipients must receive priority in the awarding of scholarships. Each state and partnership that conducts a scholarship component must use at least 25% of its funds but not more than 50% for early intervention. The 50% cap can be waived if the participant has another way of providing the scholarship assistance.

**21st Century Scholar Certificates.** The Secretary is to provide 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholar Certificates to GEAR UP students and may, as practicable, provide them to all students in grades 6-12 in schools where at least 50% of the enrollment qualifies for free or reduced-price lunches. These certificates are to be personalized for each student and indicate the amount of federal aid the student may be eligible to receive.

**Coordination.** Each participating state or partnership must ensure that its activities are coordinated with, complement, and enhance other GEAR UP services to the same district or state, and services under other federal or non-federal programs.

**Evaluations.** Biennially, each entity receiving GEAR UP funds must submit an evaluation of its activities to the Secretary. The Secretary, with up to 0.75% of the annual appropriation, is required to fund evaluations of the effectiveness of the program; the Secretary must report, biennially, to the U.S. Congress on GEAR UP evaluations.

**Funding.** The authorized appropriation level for FY1999 is \$200 million; such sums as may be necessary are authorized for the 4 succeeding fiscal years. The FY1999 appropriation is \$120 million. According to ED, these funds may support some 100,000 students. NEISP's FY1998 appropriation was \$3.6 million.

## **Implementation Issues**

The TRIO and GEAR UP programs are likely to be of continuing interest to the 106<sup>th</sup> Congress. Various overarching issues apply to both programs. Among these is whether and how services provided under these two programs will be coordinated. As described above, each program addresses, to a differing degree, the issue of coordination across federal and non-federal programs serving the target populations. Authorized services under these two programs are often the same or similar; target populations overlap. Among other related issues is whether these programs will compete against each other for annual funding. That may not have been the case in FY1999, when, despite relatively substantial initial funding for GEAR UP, the growth in TRIO funding from the previous year (13%) was the largest annual increase in TRIO funding in 7 years.

Implementation issues specific to the TRIO programs include several considered by the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress during HEA reauthorization. Concern that there is relatively limited turnover among TRIO grantees may prompt policymakers to monitor the extent to which entities new to TRIO are funded. Further, given interest in the degree to which TRIO projects serve different disadvantaged groups, the participation of specific groups, such as Hispanics, in these projects is likely to garner attention. Among 1998 amendments to the TRIO programs whose impact may be considered is the authority for UB projects to provide work-study opportunities. This authority is intended to reduce the dropout rate from UB projects by students whose family circumstances require them to work. The effects of the new authority for projects that were participating under prior law to spread successful TRIO activities among non-TRIO entities may also be of interest. Finally, ED is funding ongoing evaluations of the UB and SSS programs that may identify new issues regarding program impact for the Congress. Outcomes identified to date include greater academic course-taking by UB participants; a high dropout rate from UB projects; small but positive effects of SSS on college retention, grade point average, and credits earned; and positive effects more likely to arise with longer term participation in UB or SSS.

Congressional interest in GEAR UP may likely focus initially on how well ED implements the new legislation. Among other relevant issues is the relative balance that ED will strike between states and partnerships, particularly given the discretion that it has over the allocation of roughly a third of the annual appropriation. Other issues include the extent to which partnerships will choose to include a scholarship component (the conferees on the Higher Education Amendments of 1998, H.Rept. 105-750, encouraged the Secretary of Education to favor partnership applications proposing scholarships). Finally, results from the required biennial evaluations of GEAR UP activities may also be the subject of congressional attention.